

A Verse to Live by

"Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love."

Ephesians 4:2 (NLT)

May Prayer Focus

Please continue to pray for a quicker than expected end to this pandemic, our essential employees, and our nation as we face not only illness but economic uncertainty.

Life Application Challenge

Pandemic, shelter in place order, financial concerns, then add stress and emotions: a recipe for all kinds of fights and tension. It would be so easy for the devil to use this to cause division in God's family, in our own families, and our church. The month of May, let's just focus on being gentle with each other, showing love, tolerance and patience. We all are struggling with some aspect of

this, so let's pray for each other instead of judging each other. "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1)

Recommended Scripture Reading

Romans 8

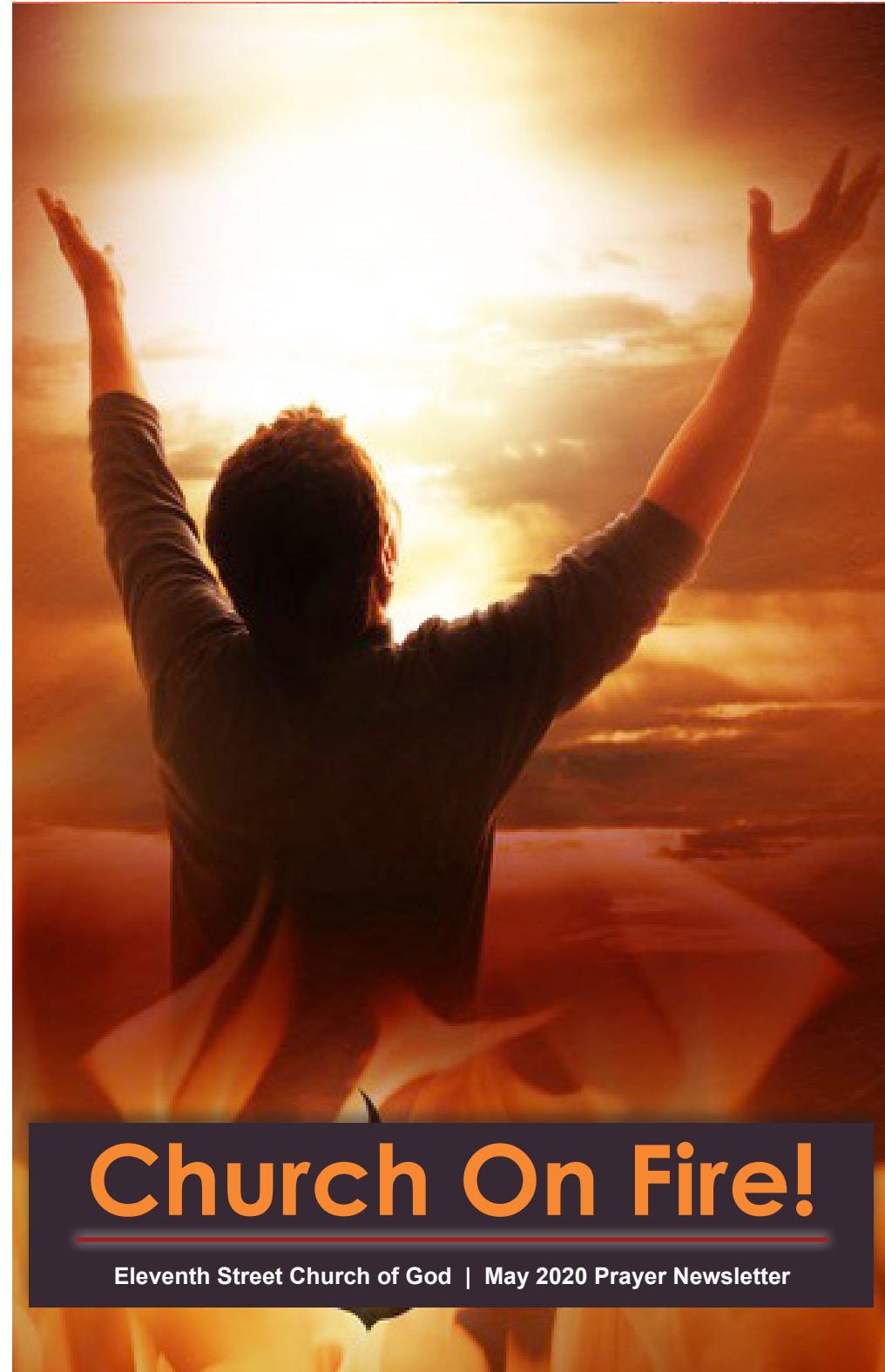
This chapter in the Bible is simply empowering for a believer.

Matthew 8:23-27

Mark 4:35-41

Luke 8:22-25

The three narratives of Jesus calming the storm.



I hope everyone has been doing well during the shelter in place order, and had a blessed Easter. I know it has been harder on some than others. I miss seeing our church family and I am sure I am not alone. Zoom is a blessing but it is not the same. I know for so many of us Sundays are a day to feel connected to others and get our spirits lifted. As we continue through this uncertain time I pray God fills each of us with faith, hope and love.

I know staying home so much and cutting out so many extra activities has forced us all to slow down. Is that a bad thing? Each of us will have a different answer to that question as our lives are all different. It has caused me to focus on my Bible studies, prayer life and consider where I spend much of my time. Sometimes we can allow good things to crowd out better things. So it has been a good time for me to realign my priorities. Yet, all this time to contemplate can also cause me to focus on the wrong things and become fearful or frustrated. I am sure many of us are struggling with this. More time to spend on social media can provide a lot of fuel for fears, anger and hopelessness to preoccupy our minds. Before we know it, we have a storm of anxiety swirling in our minds. This pandemic has caused a whirlwind of emotions for so many. Jesus warned us we would have trouble in this world, "In this world you will have trouble.", but He also gave us a guarantee, "But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Every problem we face, every fear that nags us the answer is in the Word. That is our instruction manual for how to live a purpose filled life; we find encouragement, hope and peace. He did not leave us to do this life alone. He sent us an advocate (John 16:7), the Holy Spirit, to guide us, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:13)

This pandemic is certainly a storm that came into our lives suddenly and threatens our health and well being. The disciples faced a sudden storm too. Our's is in our communities and our own bodies, theirs on the Sea of Galilee. The story appears in three of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. I will refer to the account in Mark.

"A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?' He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Notice how Mark makes a point to write Jesus was sleeping and when they woke Him they asked "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Boy does this hit home. How many times do we wonder if God is paying attention or notices how bad we are struggling. We wonder has He forgotten us, is He too busy or distracted or worse, does He even care? But even

the disciples who lived everyday in His presence, doubted Him. He was asleep while they fought on their own to stay afloat - in the midst of their raging storm. At least, it felt that way to them in that moment; they were afraid and probably upset with Him. Yet, when they called on Him even full of fear, He responded. He came to their rescue, and He calmed their storm. God hears us, even when our prayers are littered with fear, desperation and doubt. "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles." (Psalm 34:17) He may use it as a teachable moment, just as Jesus did with His disciples. After calming the storm He asked them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" By this time, they had been with Jesus long enough to witness with their own eyes him heal Peter's mother in law when she was sick, raise a widow's dead son, heal many other people, and cast out evil spirits with a command.

This was not only a moment for them to learn just how mighty Jesus was, but just who He really was. We read in verse 41 "They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41) His power to calm the sea terrified them, and made them question who He was. In other words, they started to realize who He was! Don't we too see His true power when He answers our cries in the middle of our battles? Jesus did not spare the disciples going through the storm, He did something far better: He revealed His power to save them from any storm. And that teaches them to fear not, for He has overcome the world. No matter how big the threat, how bad the situation, how great the need...He is able. He won't spare us from troubles, but He will equip us for the fight, "Praise be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress," (Psalm 144:1-2) You will not fight your battles alone, you do not have to rescue yourself. Jesus is your SAVIOR! But you do have to call on Him, you do have to face the tempest, we cannot always avoid it. Sometimes we have to "walk through the valley of the shadow of death," but we "fear no evil, for You are with me" (Psalm 23:4) Battles come, we get some bumps, bruises and scars but we will not be defeated. "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom. 8:37)

Life is hard but "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1) We know battles will come but "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:35,37-38)

Watching God Work,
Carolyn Abel